

L. Q. C. LAMAR

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LETTER
OF
LUCIUS Q. C. LAMAR,
IN REPLY TO
HON. P. F. LIDDELL,
OF CARROLLTON, MISSISSIPPI.

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WASHINGTON CITY, D. C.,

December 10, 1860.

MY DEAR SIR:

Your letter, of the 4th instant, requesting me to give you my "views as to the best method of concentrating the efforts of all the friends of a real and bona fide resistance in Mississippi, and the South, to Black Republican rule," is before me. Apart from my disposition to oblige an esteemed friend, the relations which exist between the people of Mississippi and myself as one of their representatives in the Federal Congress, the uniform kindness and confidence I have experienced from the portion that form my immediate constituents, and the necessity I feel for frank and open-hearted communication with them, are additional reasons for complying with your request.

The result of the recent Presidential contest has inflicted a dangerous, perhaps a fatal wound on the confidence of the southern States in the integrity of the Federal Government.

I have not supposed that the Federal Executive would always command the support, or inspire confidence and esteem among all the peoples of the Union. The framers of the Constitution did not anticipate that we should always have a wise, faithful, and patriotic President.

We may reasonably expect that delusions will often exist in respect to the worth of a nominee for that office, and that parties and demagogues may sometimes succeed in debauching or misleading the popular judgment in favor of an unworthy candidate. There is, in our Constitution, important checks upon the Presidential power, and the tenure of office is not so long as to enable a vicious man, unassisted, to do irreparable mischief, even in the full possession of that power. The people of the South understand fully the nature and functions of the Federal Government. They do not need to be taught that its legitimate structure furnishes them ample and efficient means of checking the vices of Executive administration, protecting themselves against the hostile and unconstitutional purposes of the existing incumbent, and of even repairing such violations of the fundamental law as may, during his term of service, be beyond their control. The personal character of Mr. Lincoln, and his political opinions (except so far as they represented that armed doctrine which menaces our peace, and was contrived for our degradation and dishonor) has not formed with them the subject of either inquiry or interest. The stern protest which has spontaneously leaped from the hearts of the southern people, simultaneous, and yet

without any concert, free from revolutionary excesses or party recklessness, indicates a thorough knowledge of the real extent and depth of the grievances inflicted upon them, and shows a political maturity in that people, adequate to evolve the proper remedy and firmly to apply it.

Let us look at this event in its mildest aspect, dissociated from the sectional hostilities in which it originated, and apart from the purposes which it was designed to accomplish. It is the first step towards the subversion of American representative liberty.

There is, as you know, a northern and a southern theory of the Constitution; the latter regarding the United States as a confederacy of States, sovereign, independent, and equal; the former regarding it as one political community—a consolidated republic, in which a majority of the people govern under the forms of the Constitution. Either theory may be adopted for the purpose of my argument. Let us, for the sake of argument, adopt the latter. It is an essential condition of representative liberty, that the powers of Government, (of which the choice of rulers is not the least important,) be distributed through the entire mass of the nation. This is the point from which all representative liberty starts, and to which it must return. That the central authority must derive its nutriment, and draw its force from all the parts of the entire body of society, so that, by their reciprocal independence, they can counteract the tendency of any one part to usurp the sovereignty of the whole. It is required that all the parts should seek and contribute to legitimate rule in common; and, if any part, whatever be their number, insulated from the rest, assumes the common Government over the others by virtue of a prerogative which it arrogates to itself as its exclusive possession, the result is not liberty; it is tyranny un-mixed. Test the recent Presidential election by this principle. The northern States—or if you prefer the expression—the northern people, have usurped an entire branch of the Government, to the exclusion of the southern people. I do not wish to be understood as saying that the southern people have been deprived of the privilege of depositing their ballots and having them counted with all the formalities of law. My proposition is, that the *principle*, not the *form* of representative Government, has been violated. The policy of a conquering power has ever been to disguise its grasp upon the liberties of a people under the sameness of external forms; not to startle the people by any striking alterations, but to cheat them by respect for their usages and customs into acquiescence in the control which it covertly assumes over their public affairs. The Greek Republics retained all their forms of municipal government: the freedom of legislative and ju-

dicial proceedings unchanged, while all Greece lay, at the feet of Philip, a subjugated nation. This is the relation which the southern people, if they quietly submit to this election, will sustain to the Executive department of the Government on the 4th day of March, 1861. They will live under a Chief Magistrate whose power touches them at every point, penetrating into their States, their towns, cities, villages, and settlements, their business arrangements, and family relations—a Chief Magistrate elected, in no part *by them*, but *over them*, by another people widely distant from them in locality, and still more widely distinct in passions, prejudices, interests, civil and domestic institutions, than they are in geographical position. The obligation to submit and live under a Chief Magistrate thus elected, one Presidential term, implies the obligation to do so under an indefinite number of terms—forever. The right of the North to place the Executive Department in such a relation to the southern people, involves the right to place all the departments of the Government in that relation. But would that be representative liberty? Liberty does not exist where rights are on one side and power on the other. To be liberty, rights must be armed with vital powers. A people cannot be free, who do not participate in the control of the Government which operates upon them. If it is irresponsible to them, if they cannot contribute to the check upon its operations, they are not a free people, but subjects, dependent for their rights and interests, upon no power in themselves, but upon the moderation and justice of irresponsible rulers; or upon those revolutionary remedies which constitute no part of the machinery of civil society. Such will be the condition of the southern people if they remain in the Union until after the 4th of March next. You will observe that it is a matter of no importance to the people of the South, whether Mr. Lincoln was elected according to the forms of the Constitution or in disregard of those forms. Had he been appointed by the Governors of the northern States, or nominated by the Crowned Heads of Europe, his selection as Chief Magistrate would have been, in either case, no more in disregard of the wishes, interests, and feelings of the entire South, than his election has actually been. When one of the vital principles of a political system has been destroyed, society, in all its elements, is thrown into disorder. In this election the Democratic element of our Government shares the fate of the representative idea. Mr. Lincoln is elected by a minority of nearly a million votes—the South being thus subjected to all the terrors of a passionate Democracy, and the tyranny of a selfish oligarchy. It may be said that this is a mere temporary displacement of the political forces, and that another Presidential election will readjust them, and restore the harmonious operation of our political system.

But our people cannot shut their eyes to the fact, that this revolution in the *Government* only manifests and embodies a mightier *moral revolution*, which has for fifty years upheaved the bosom of northern society—a revolution which has never gone backward, and whose very law is progression. They cannot but see, in this election, the sword of empire drawn by a fanatical majority section, in a contest which cannot be declined, and yet, on the issue of which, the existence of the minority section is staked; that it is a movement impelled by a fanaticism, whose footsteps have never been seen in voluntary retreat; that it is a victory secured by the citizens of States whose Legislatures have solemnly recorded their determination that no oath shall bind them to observe the constitutional compact in respect to slavery. They are convinced that this anti-slavery fanaticism is rife at the North, and that society, in all its elements, is surcharged with the deadly poison; that it infects their literature, pervades their jurisprudence, is the animating spirit of their theology, is taught in their academies and schools, and they behold the party which represents this spirit, entrenched, (by overwhelming majorities in all their States save one,) in the departments of the Federal Government, armed with the sword in one hand, and the purse in the other.

According to the theory of the Constitution which prevails at the South, ours is a Confederacy of independent and equal States. A Confederacy of itself, in the absence of any express stipulation is an implied recognition of, and friendliness to the subsisting institutions of its various members. By this election, the non-slaveholding States have seized upon the powers of a common Government, with the declared purpose *that these States shall not continue part slaveholding, and part non-slaveholding*. There is no proposition better established than that the overthrow of the civil and domestic institutions of one people by an external or foreign power, is, in effect, a conquest and subjugation of the former. The Southern people are law-abiding, long-suffering and averse to rash innovations; but where the alternative is presented, of a change in their political relations, or an overthrow of their political institutions, they will not hesitate.

Such an election (in view of all the circumstances attending it) in my judgment not only justifies but imperatively demands of the Southern States to take measures for their security. I believe this sentiment is entertained from Mason's and Dixon's line to the Rio Grande; and that hundreds of thousands in the northern States, who have opposed in vain the unrelenting hostility of our persecutors, regard it with approbation. There is of course a diversity of opinion as to the extent of the measures to be taken. There is a large class

in the more northerly of the slaveholding States who will be content with measures of vigilance, and who look to a reorganization of parties which will modify the action of the Federal Government, or insure the overthrow of the party which has succeeded in the present election. The friends of the Constitution and the Union in the northern States, they think, compose a larger class than the Presidential election indicates. They have a natural dislike to what they deem extra Constitutional or extreme measures, and are willing to abide the issue of the election. I think that in the more southern States the time has passed when parties can command confidence. They rather fatigue contempt. A second class fully recognize the existence of an arrogant and contumelious disregard of their obligations by the New England States and Wisconsin and Michigan, in relation to the law for the extradition of fugitive slaves, and that self-respect requires that notice should be taken of their measures of nullification. They are ready to make a demand for redress, and to put it in the power of these States to take measures to place the Union on Constitutional foundations. They require time for consultation among the southern States and for a change of sentiment at the North, so that before resorting to the extreme measure of Disunion they shall have exhausted every other remedy. A third class,—considering the long agitation that has existed upon the subject of slavery, its fatal effects upon the society of the United States, and their conviction that there will be no suspension or pause in the agitation, and that the conflict is indeed irrepressible, and arises in the antagonism that exists in the political and social ideas of the two sections, and that the predominance of the anti-slavery idea in the politics of the northern States, has been and will be sufficient to prevail against the opposition of the entire South, even in combination with their friends in the North—are in favor of secession. But considering all the evils that belong to any disruption of the Government, and appreciating the value of the existing Union, are willing to return to it with loyalty, if they can find adequate guarantees for their security from further collision and strife. This class would expect amendments to the Federal Constitution, so that the conditions of slavery in the States and Territories, and in all places of Federal jurisdiction be placed beyond cavil or dispute, and that the slaveholding States should mutually guarantee their own rights, so that in the event of the renewal of another slavery agitation the remedy will be plain and adequate. There is a fourth class of energetic, resolute and high spirited men who consider the Federal Government a failure, the connection of northern and southern States as unnatural, and the independence of the latter a supreme

good—these are for immediate, unconditional and even abrupt secession. The first class is diminishing in numbers and influence, and the fourth class is increasing. This class is dominant in one State, commands perhaps a majority in one other, and is very influential in all. It is possible that all the classes, which favor some action, would be brought to act in concert if they only understood one another's opinions. In my judgment this long continued and rancorous agitation, which has divided our churches, rent asunder political parties, diminished and embittered the intercourse of society, unfitted Congress for the performance of the functions imposed by the Constitution, the incendiary dispositions manifested, in its course, by the representative men of the northern States, and the habitual attack upon the foundations of our society by men occupying public stations of the highest trust and responsibility, have estranged the majority of the southern people from their northern connection, and they would prefer a Union among themselves, other conditions being equal. That is, if a Southern Confederacy could be formed without war, or violent change in existing conditions, the popular mind would receive no shock. The people would anticipate more of security and happiness than in the present Union.

The corruption of the State and municipal governments North, the magnitude of their cities, and the consequent disorder and crime and disparity of condition among the inhabitants, the increase of heterogeneous populations, their red republicanism, infidelity and anti-christian ideas, the intemperance and violence and indecorum of the northern clergy, and the anarchy of opinions upon all questions of social interest, and the want of any sound public opinion furnish strong evidence that sooner or later society there will experience a general overturn. But the distrust of northern institutions and the dislike of northern manners are not active or stimulating emotions, and show themselves rather in the want of any anxiety to disturb or restrain this movement. If the formation of a Southern Confederacy, to extend from the Delaware or the Susquehannah to the western line of New Mexico, or to include California were adopted, I believe a large majority of the southern people would be rejoiced. I believe that the patience of the people with New England and some of the western States, is exhausted. In my opinion it is the duty of all the members of the southern States, in the present emergency, to maintain a large, liberal, and magnanimous course of conduct to one another. "To be subject one to another is the lesson of wisdom in this conjunction of affairs. It is not necessary for me to declare to what class of those I have enumerated I now belong, for I shall not enlist as a par-

tisan of any opinion, in any part of this contest. I shall resign my own opinions with facility whenever I can perceive that good can be accomplished. What I desire to have, what I desire to represent and coöperate with, is the sound, sound, and deliberate opinion of the people of Mississippi first, and then of all the southern States after a candid, impartial, and deliberate review of the whole subject, and having reference to all their responsibilities, to themselves, their ancestors, and their posterity.

But I feel it my duty to say, that I think acquiescence on the part of the South, in the results of the late Presidential contest, is fraught with more danger to the safety of her society, the stability of her institutions, the freedom of her citizens, and the lives of her people, than can possibly attend any of the plans of resistance to Black Republican rule.

Upon the stability of slavery in the southern States, as an institution of society, government, and property, entitled to the recognition and protection of the Federal Government at home and abroad, and the right to carry our property upon the common territories of the Union, and to enjoy it there, without bar or hindrance from any quarter, I am prepared to advise firmness. Believing, as I did, that a vast majority of the southern people prefer a Union of the southern States to the existing connection with the North—provided such a result could be secured without radical changes in their fundamental system, or shock to existing conditions—I submitted, for the consideration of the Legislature of our State, the plan to which your letter refers. It is intended to avoid the perils that attend transitions from dismemberment to reorganization, and also the evils of provisional governments.

The leading feature of that plan is the adoption of the present Government either by a General Convention of the Southern States, or by commissioners appointed by their authority, who shall provide that the Constitution of the United States shall remain in full force and effect among the States withdrawing; that the laws and decisions of courts which are now of force in the Republic of North America under the authority thereof, shall be adopted as a body of laws for the Federal Government about to be established; that the people of the States so withdrawing will bind themselves to observe and sacredly carry out the stipulations of all treaties subsisting between the United States of North America and foreign Governments anterior to the date of said ordinance, until such treaties are changed or altered, or are disregarded by such nation with this Government about to be established. As the first step in this direction I submit for your consideration the ordinance which I think the people of Mississippi should adopt in their Convention of the 7th of January.

An ordinance of the convention of the people of Mississippi, assembled at the Capitol of the State, at Jackson, pursuant to the election of the people pursuant to an act of the General Assembly of the State of Mississippi, entitled, &c., &c.

WHEREAS, on the 1st day of March, 1817, the Congress of the United States passed an act entitled "An Act to enable the western part of the Mississippi Territory to form a constitution and State government, and for the admission of such State into the Union on an equal footing with the original States;" and,

WHEREAS, on the 15th of August, 1817, the people of Mississippi, by a convention called for the purpose, did form for themselves a constitution and State government, and by ordinance then did consent to become a member of the Federal Union, on an equal footing with the original States; and,

WHEREAS, on the 10th December, 1817, by resolution of the Congress of the United States, the State of Mississippi became a member of the Federal Union, and has remained such from thence hitherto; and,

WHEREAS, for sufficient causes, in the opinion of this convention, the said Federal Union should be dissolved.

Be it therefore ordained by the authority of the people of Mississippi, in convention assembled, that the ordinance of the 15th day of August, 1817, by which the State of Mississippi consented to become a member of the Federal Union, be, and the same is hereby repealed, and that the State of Mississippi resume all the rights, powers, and functions therein conveyed, and be divested of all the restraints and duties contracted in favor of the said Federal Union, and from henceforth be a free and independent State.

SEC. 2. *Be it further ordained*, That the State of Mississippi hereby consents to form a Federal Union with the States of Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, Texas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri, and the Territory of New Mexico, and the Indian Territory west of Arkansas, under the name and style of the United States of America, and according to the tenor and effect of the Constitution of the United States, adopted September 12, 1787, saving and excepting such parts thereof as embrace other portions than the States above named.

SEC. 3. *Be it further ordained*, That the laws enacted by the United States, under the said Constitution, from 1789 until the day of the sitting of this convention, and all treaties made under the authority of the same, shall be obligatory

upon the people of Mississippi, in so far as they are applicable, in the same manner as if this ordinance had not been made until the termination of the first Congress of the Government hereinafter mentioned.

SEC. 4. *Be it further ordained*, That all officers of the United States, within the limits of Mississippi, shall remain in office, and perform the same functions therein, until the Federal Union hereby ordained shall be fully organized and established.

SEC. 5. That all the regulations, contracts, and engagements made by the United States of America shall continue to be binding as before upon the State of Mississippi, and that provision shall be made for the fulfillment of the obligation in respect thereof.

SEC. 6. That the Governor of Mississippi shall perform all the functions of President of the United States, under this Constitution, within the limits of Mississippi, until the organization of the Federal Union referred to in the second section of this ordinance.

SEC. 7. The accession of nine of the States mentioned in article two is requisite to give this ordinance effect, and for the establishment of the Constitution between the States ratifying the same.

SEC. 8. That it shall be the duty of the Governor, immediately after the event described in the last preceding article, to direct an election of members to Congress in each of the Congressional districts, and also to direct the election of electors of President and Vice President at the same time, under all the regulations, except as to time, as are contained in the existing laws.

It will be observed that the plan proposed aims *at no change in our form of Government, but seeks to protect existing forms from destruction*. It proposes to give us our old glorious Constitution in vigorous operation, strong enough to suppress domestic violence and repel foreign invasion, safe, in the affections of our people, from the attacks of fanaticism and sectionalism and Black Republicanism and Red Republicanism all combined. It gives us all the laws of the old Republic, and those grand decisions of the Judiciary, which have grown up around the Constitution, as part of the fundamental law, and are almost as sacred as the Constitution itself. It proclaims to the civilized world that as loyalty to the Constitution is the law of our conduct at home, so will good faith and the observance of treaties regulate our intercourse abroad. It gives us the traditions and the historic wealth, colonial and revolutionary, of the glorious old Commonwealth of Virginia.

In a word, it gives us the Union and Constitution as the Fathers made them, and separates us from the enemies to both, who themselves have seceded from the Constitution, and are indeed rebels and traitors.

With great respect, your friend,

L. Q. C. LAMAR.

To Hon. P. F. LIDDELL,
Carrollton, Mississippi.









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